

Chapter 1

Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Overview

Scope

The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service fire and fire aviation program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout this handbook. This handbook attempts to quote verbatim, rather than to paraphrase policy that is stated elsewhere. It also attempts to limit duplication of source policy when a reference will suffice. Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations is intended to comply with and support the Review and Update of the *1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)* and the Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (February 13, 2009 and other existing federal policy).

Purpose

The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* provides fire and fire aviation program management direction for Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service managers. Employees engaged in fire management activities will continue to comply with all agency-specific health and safety policy. Other references, such as the *National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Response Pocket Guide* (PMS 461, NFES 1077) and the *NWCG Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide* (PMS 210) provide operational guidance.

Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)

The *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)* is comprised of the following guiding principles and discrete policies. As a whole these principles and policy statements guide the philosophy, direction, and implementation of fire management planning, activities, and projects on federal lands.

Guiding Principles of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.
2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process. Federal agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use and desired future condition of the various public lands.

- 1 3. Fire Management Plans (FMPs), programs, and activities support Land and
2 Resource Management Plans and their implementation.
 - 3 4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities.
4 Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be
5 understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost
6 of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will
7 be an important component of decisions.
 - 8 5. Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based
9 upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management
10 objectives. Federal agency administrators are adjusting and re-organizing
11 programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process,
12 investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other
13 agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set
14 short and long term priorities, and clarify management accountability.
 - 15 6. FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge
16 and experience are developed among all wildland fire management
17 agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency
18 collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire
19 managers.
 - 20 7. FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality
21 considerations.
 - 22 8. Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and
23 cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require
24 that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with
25 the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full
26 collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies,
27 international, state, tribal, and local governments, and private entities results
28 in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of
29 public needs.
 - 30 9. Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an
31 ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the
32 fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate
33 fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for
34 cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.
- 35 – *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management*
36 *Policy (January 2001)*

1 **Elements of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

2 1. **Safety**

3 Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All FMPs and activities
4 must reflect this commitment.

5 2. **Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**

6 The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve
7 ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and
8 social components.

9 3. **Response to Wildland Fire**

10 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource
11 management plans and activities on a landscape scale across agency
12 boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and
13 legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs,
14 the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, the
15 natural and cultural resources, and the values to be protected dictate the
16 appropriate response to fire.

17 4. **Use of Wildland Fire**

18 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and,
19 as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.
20 Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific
21 prescriptions contained in operational plans.

22 5. **Rehabilitation and Restoration**

23 Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and
24 sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect
25 infrastructure.

26 6. **Protection Priorities**

27 The protection of human life is the single overriding suppression priority.
28 Setting priorities among protecting public communities and community
29 infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural
30 resources will be done based on the values to be protected, public health
31 and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to
32 an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be
33 protected.

34 7. **Wildland Urban Interface**

35 The operational roles of the federal agencies as partners in the wildland
36 urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative
37 prevention, education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression
38 is the responsibility of tribal, state, or local governments. Federal agencies
39 may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities under formal fire
40 protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the
41 partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural
42 protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may
43 also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with
44 structural protection.)

- 1 8. **Planning**
2 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs
3 are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed
4 fires based on the area's approved land management plan (LMP). FMPs
5 must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management
6 strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected, and
7 public health issues; and be consistent with resource management
8 objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.
- 9 9. **Science**
10 FMPs and fire programs will be based on a foundation of the best available
11 science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific
12 knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information
13 needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated
14 interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available
15 to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of
16 LMPs, FMPs, and implementation plans.
- 17 10. **Preparedness**
18 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire
19 management programs in support of land and resource management plans
20 through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and
21 management oversight.
- 22 11. **Suppression**
23 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public
24 safety, benefits and all values to be protected consistent with resource
25 objectives.
- 26 12. **Prevention**
27 Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups, and
28 individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
- 29 13. **Standardization**
30 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms,
31 training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-
32 be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire
33 management activities.
- 34 14. **Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**
35 Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression,
36 restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be
37 conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and
38 partners.
- 39 15. **Communication and Education**
40 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire
41 management policies and practices through internal and external
42 communication and education programs. These programs will be
43 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of
44 information among all affected agencies and organizations.

1 16. **Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

2 Agency Administrators will ensure their employees are trained, certified,
3 and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally,
4 regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with
5 operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire
6 programs as necessary. Agency Administrators are responsible and will be
7 held accountable for making employees available.

8 17. **Evaluation**

9 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to
10 determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001
11 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The evaluation will assure
12 accountability, facilitate resolution in areas of conflict, and identify resource
13 shortages and agency priorities.

14 –*Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*
15 *(January 2001)*

16 ***Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy***
17 ***(February 13, 2009)***

18 On February 13, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (FEC) approved guidance for
19 the implementation of federal wildland fire management policy. This guidance
20 provides for consistent implementation of the *Review and Update of the 1995*
21 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)*, as directed by the
22 Wildland Fire Leadership Council.

23 –*Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management*
24 *Policy (February 13, 2009), page 3.*

25 The following guidelines should be used to provide consistent implementation
26 of federal wildland fire policy:

- 27 1. Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all
28 aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective
29 collaboration among cooperating agencies.
- 30 2. Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that
31 clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and
32 responsibilities among local, state, tribal, and federal fire protection entities.
- 33 3. Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government
34 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
- 35 4. Fire Management Plans will be intergovernmental in scope and developed
36 on a landscape scale.

- 1 5. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs
- 2 in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
- 3 a. Wildfires – Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared
- 4 wildfires.
- 5 b. Prescribed Fires – Planned ignitions.
- 6 6. A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives
- 7 and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.
- 8 Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying
- 9 social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental
- 10 jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
- 11 7. Management response to a wildland fire on federal land is based on
- 12 objectives established in the applicable Land/Resource Management Plan,
- 13 and/or the Fire Management Plan.
- 14 8. Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the
- 15 lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to
- 16 firefighter and public safety.
- 17 9. Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document
- 18 wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational
- 19 assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and
- 20 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.
- 21 – *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management*
- 22 *Policy (February 13, 2009), page 7.*

23 Definitions

24 Wildland Fire

25 Any non-structure fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels. Wildland fire
26 includes prescribed fire and wildfire.

27 Fire Type

28 Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:

- 29 • Wildfires – Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared
- 30 wildfires.
- 31 • Prescribed fires – Planned ignition.

32 Wildfire Management Objectives

33 A wildfire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives as specified
34 in the L/RMP and FMP. Objectives can change as the fire spreads across the
35 landscape and are affected by changes in fuels, weather, and/or topography;
36 varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other
37 governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.

- 38 • **FS** – *All wildfires will have a protection objective.*

1 **Response to Wildfire**

2 Response to wildfire will be coordinated with all affected agencies/cooperators
3 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition point.

4 Management response to a wildfire on federal land is based on objectives
5 established in the applicable L/RMP and FMP. A wildfire may be concurrently
6 managed for more than one objective. Unplanned natural ignitions may be
7 managed to achieve L/RMP and FMP objectives when risk is within acceptable
8 limits.

- 9 • **BLM** – *All known human caused fires, except escaped prescribed fires, will*
10 *be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource*
11 *benefits.*
- 12 • **NPS** – *Refer to RM-18, Chapter 2 for further guidance.*
- 13 • **FWS** – *All escaped prescribed fires will be suppressed. When reporting in*
14 *FMIS, the cause of the wildfire will be “Escaped RX” and the narrative will*
15 *document the link between the prescribed fire and the wildfire.*
- 16 • **FS** – *Human caused fires and trespass fires must be suppressed safely and*
17 *cost effectively and must not be managed for resource benefits.*

18 Response to wildfire is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of
19 the fire. The appropriate response to the fire is dictated by:

- 20 • The circumstances under which a fire occurs;
- 21 • The likely consequences to firefighter/public safety and welfare; and
- 22 • The natural/cultural resource values to be protected.

23 **Initial Response**

24 The initial decisions and actions taken in reaction to a reported incident.

25 **Initial Attack (IA)**

26 A preplanned response to a wildfire given the wildfire’s potential. Initial Attack
27 may include size up, patrolling, monitoring, holding action or suppression.

28 **Extended Attack**

29 Actions taken on a wildfire that has exceeded the initial response.

30 **Extended Attack Incident**

31 An incident that exceeds the capability of the initial attack resources and/or
32 organization to successfully manage the incident to conclusion.

33 **Suppression**

34 Management action to extinguish a fire or confine fire spread beginning with its
35 discovery.

36 **Protection**

37 The actions taken to mitigate the adverse effects of fire on environmental, social,
38 political, economic, and community values at risk.

1 Prescribed Fire

- 2 Any fire intentionally ignited by management actions in accordance with
3 applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific objectives.

4 Fire Operations Doctrine**5 Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

- 6 Fire operations doctrine states the fundamental principles on the subject of fire
7 operations. This doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about fire
8 operations. It provides a philosophy for leading firefighters in fire operations, a
9 mandate for professionalism, and a common language. Fire operations doctrine
10 does not consist of procedures to be applied to specific situations so much as it
11 sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application.

12 The Nature of Fire Operations

- 13 Fire is a complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable phenomenon. Fire
14 operations require mobilizing a complex organization that includes
15 management, command, support, and firefighting personnel, as well as aircraft,
16 vehicles, machinery, and communications equipment. While the magnitude and
17 complexity of the fire itself and of the human response to it will vary, the fact
18 that fire operations are inherently dangerous will never change. A firefighter
19 utilizing the best available science, equipment, training, and working within the
20 scope of agency doctrine and policy, can still suffer serious injury or death.

21 Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management

- 22 The primary means by which we prevent accidents in wildland fire operations is
23 through aggressive risk management. Our safety philosophy acknowledges that
24 while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard free work environment is not
25 a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized,
26 comprehensive, and systematic risk management, we will determine the
27 acceptable level of risk that allows us to provide for safety yet still achieve fire
28 operations objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of
29 injuries or fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.

30 Fire Preparedness

- 31 Fire preparedness is the state of being ready to provide an appropriate response
32 to wildland fires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the result of
33 activities that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions. Preparedness
34 requires identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and implementing
35 coordinated programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness requires a
36 continuous process of developing and maintaining firefighting infrastructure,
37 predicting fire activity, implementing prevention activities, identifying values to
38 be protected, hiring, training, equipping, pre-positioning, and deploying
39 firefighters and equipment, evaluating performance, correcting deficiencies, and
40 improving operations. All preparedness activities should be focused on

1 developing fire operations capabilities and on performing successful fire
2 operations.

3 **Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

4 It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire
5 operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in
6 fire operations, and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commanders'
7 intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly
8 articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on
9 their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander's intent. A
10 competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may
11 understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance
12 removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to
13 take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational
14 objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or
15 that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and
16 cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective. Unified,
17 coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the fireline or
18 between the highest command level and the most subordinate firefighter, is
19 critical to successful fire operations.

20 **Fire Leadership**

21 Leadership is the art of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The most
22 essential element for success in the wildland fire service is good leadership.
23 Good leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation for wildland
24 firefighters working to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous, stressful
25 circumstances. Leaders often face difficult problems to which there are no
26 simple, clear-cut, by-the-book solutions. In these situations, leaders must use
27 their knowledge, skill, experience, education, values, and judgment to make
28 decisions and to take or direct action - in short, to provide leadership. All
29 firefighters, regardless of position, must provide leadership.

30 **Fire Suppression**

31 The purpose of fire suppression is to put the fire out in a safe, effective, and
32 efficient manner. Fires are easier and less expensive to suppress when they are
33 small. When the management goal is full suppression, aggressive initial attack is
34 the single most important method to ensure the safety of firefighters and the
35 public and to limit suppression costs. Aggressive initial attack provides the
36 Incident Commander maximum flexibility in suppression operations. Successful
37 initial attack relies on speed and appropriate force. All aspects of fire
38 suppression benefit from this philosophy. Planning, organizing, and
39 implementing fire suppression operations should always meet the objective of
40 directly, quickly, and economically contributing to the suppression effort. Every
41 firefighter, whether in a management, command, support, or direct suppression
42 role, should be committed to maximizing the speed and efficiency with which
43 the most capable firefighters can engage in suppression action. When the

1 management goal is other than full suppression, or when conditions dictate a
2 limited suppression response, decisiveness is still essential and an aggressive
3 approach toward accomplishment of objectives is still critical.

4 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

5 The primary means by which we implement command decisions and maintain
6 unity of action is through the use of common principles of suppression
7 operations. These principles guide our fundamental fire suppression practices,
8 behaviors, and customs, and are mutually understood at every level of
9 command. They include Risk Management, Standard Firefighting Orders and
10 Watch Out Situations, LCES, and the Downhill Line Construction Checklist.
11 These principles are fundamental to how we perform fire suppression operations
12 and are intended to improve decision making and firefighter safety. They are not
13 absolute rules. They require judgment in application.

14 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

15 The principles of fire suppression action provide a framework for developing
16 fire suppression strategy and for conducting fire suppression operations. Again,
17 these are not absolute or immutable rules. These five principles provide a
18 consistent set of considerations with which to evaluate decisions, plans, and
19 actions in different situations.

20 1. **Objective**

21 The principle of the objective is to direct every fire suppression operation
22 toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective. The purpose of
23 fire suppression operations is to achieve the suppression objectives that
24 support the overall management goals for the fire.

25 2. **Speed and Focus**

26 Speed is rapidity of action. Focus is the convergence of appropriate
27 resources at the desired position to initiate action. The principle of speed
28 and focus maintains that rapidly deploying and concentrating firefighting
29 resources, in a calculated fashion, at the decisive time and place increases
30 the likelihood of successful suppression actions.

31 3. **Positioning**

32 The principle of positioning maintains that rapid, flexible, and opportunistic
33 movement increases the effectiveness of fire suppression resources.
34 Positioning ranges from single resource offensive or defensive reactions to
35 dynamic fire conditions, to pre-positioning of multiple resources based on
36 predicted activity and values at risk. Positioning should always be
37 undertaken with speed and focus in mind and with sufficient time for
38 positioning to occur before operations begin.

39 4. **Simplicity**

40 The principle of simplicity is that clear, uncomplicated plans and concise
41 orders maximize effectiveness and minimize confusion. Simplicity
42 contributes to successful actions.

1 5. **Safety**

2 The principle of safety maintains that ensuring the safety of firefighters and
3 other persons affected by fire operations is fundamental to successful
4 suppression action. Safety not only contributes to successful actions, it is
5 indispensable to them.

6 **Cost Effective Fire Operations**

7 Maximizing the cost effectiveness of any fire operation is the responsibility of
8 all involved, including those that authorize, direct, or implement those
9 operations. Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the suppression
10 resources necessary to accomplish mission objectives. Accomplishing fire
11 operations objectives safely and efficiently will not be sacrificed for the sole
12 purpose of “cost savings.” Care will be taken to ensure that suppression
13 expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected, while understanding
14 that other factors may influence spending decisions, including the social,
15 political, economic, and biophysical environments.